

# The European defence project and the Prague summit

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For the second half of the twentieth century, most west European armed forces trained extensively for a war that did not take place. Whether Cold War preparations actually caused the 'non-war' is, of course, more a matter of conjecture than of proof. What can be said with confidence is that the threat of Soviet and Warsaw Pact ground, air and naval aggression in and around Europe was taken seriously and urgently; so much so that fighting the Cold War—a non-war—with a combination of deterrence and defence became the central preoccupation of the greater part of western Europe's armed forces. In a curious way, the military style of the Cold War thus became one of extensive *non*-use of military force. This state of affairs ended more abruptly than could have been predicted as the Cold War came to a halt; and, with the disappearance of the common external threat, the West's armed forces seemed for a moment to have even less to do. But, as the 1990s wore on, it became clear that these forces—albeit at lower levels and configured with much less emphasis on heavy armoured warfare—would be confronted by many new tasks and challenges. With the armoured manoeuvring of the 1991 Gulf War widely seen as an echo of a bygone military era, a new strategic paradigm was assumed to lie somewhere in the military smorgasbord of the 1990s. Although the quest for the new strategic and doctrinal orthodoxy has proved to be a drawn-out affair, and the outcome so far inconclusive, there is nevertheless mounting confidence that the strategic style of the Cold War should be quietly shelved.

NATO forces have hardly been idle in the past decade. Between 1992 and 1995 the alliance acted to enforce a number of UN resolutions over Bosnia, flying over 100,000 sorties, shooting down its first enemy warplanes in anger—four Serbian Galebs—and making some 74,000 ship challenges in the Adriatic. In 1995 NATO undertook the deployment of 60,000 troops in the Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia to give effect to the Dayton peace agreement, and followed this with the 31,000 troops of the Stabilization Force (SFOR), which is still in existence. In the Kosovo crisis of 1998–9 the verification mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe was backed up by NATO aerial surveillance, and in March 1999 NATO forces launched Operation

Allied Force against the Serbian regime of President Milosevic in a 77-day air campaign that involved some 38,000 sorties—14 of the 19 members of the alliance contributing aircraft to the operation. After handling aspects of the humanitarian dislocation in Albania and Macedonia which arose as a result of the crisis, in June 1999 NATO provided the Kosovo Force (KFOR), which grew to 50,000 troops within a month and also remains in existence. In August 2001 NATO forces provided a weapons disarmament mission to Macedonia, and have remained engaged there, with some 700 troops assisting EU and OSCE monitors.

However, if the numbers on their own are impressive, the underlying dynamics within the alliance have been less so. The various Bosnia and Kosovo operations exposed genuine differences of emphasis between some of the allies—and especially between the US and its European partners—and raised serious doubts about the military compatibility of technically advanced US forces in operating with their European counterparts.

In turning its attention to the more immediate crises in and around Europe—deploying tens of thousands in ‘peace enforcement’ operations rather than millions in ‘defensive war’—NATO has been faced with real military operations rather than deterrence based on a hypothetical scenario of major conflict. The threat of the Soviet Third Shock Army, the need for rapid air interdiction of follow-on forces, the security of bridges on the Rhine and the battle for the Atlantic sea-lines of communication must all be consigned to history. Europe’s new strategic challenge is asymmetric warfare: the campaign of the weak but clever against the strong but ponderous and vulnerable. The new challenge calls for a multifunctional response, involving politics, diplomacy and economics in addition to any military response. The experience of the past decade indicates that NATO forces, as a whole, are not as good at this type of warfare as might have been expected. The precise application of military forces in numbers that would have appeared almost trivial to major war-planning in the previous era has posed great problems for NATO forces, particularly for European militaries. There may still be well over two million men and women under arms among the European powers, but the fact remains that the effective deployment of even one-tenth of that number to a modern—real—military operation within Europe itself is totally beyond their existing capacity.

Operating with much smaller numbers, the accent is on Western military forces that are focused on expeditionary operations. As Britain’s defence secretary has put it, it is ‘much better to engage our enemies in their backyard than in ours, at a time and place of our choosing and not theirs’. There is also a need for forces to be sufficiently flexible and mobile—to be capable of ‘network-centric’ warfare where they are required to fight relatively frequent conventional military engagements, ensuring that the so-called ‘sense-sort-shoot’ process is effective and—above all—much quicker than the enemy’s. The US can set the trend in these directions and can afford to take such developments in its stride, but the problem for European governments is that all this is both expensive and exposing. Even if individual European governments were willing to buy all the new

equipment and capabilities needed (and there is too little sign of improvements in the sum or efficiency of European defence spending), they would be reluctant to go it alone. As a result, some sort of collaboration will be necessary, either through a formal alliance or through a less formal 'coalition of the willing'. In either case, some level of institutional infrastructure is presupposed. In this article, we review the state of the two security and defence institutions available to west Europeans: NATO and the EU's common European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). In each case, we assess the political maturity and stability of the institution, and then ask what it can contribute, in terms of coordinated military capability, to western Europe's strategic readiness.

### **The Prague summit**

Enlargement appears to be back at the top of NATO's political agenda. The November 2002 summit meeting in Prague will see the next tranche of applicants selected to begin accession negotiations. Some of the ten candidacies would have been inconceivable just a few years ago, and other applicants are likely to be deeply disappointed. Yet, particularly when compared to the run-up to the first post-Cold War enlargement of 1999, the current debate is distinctly muted. Clearly, several NATO countries are distracted by the aftermath of the 11 September terrorist attacks, by operations in Afghanistan and by the question of a possible military attack against Iraq. If enlargement is back at the top of NATO's political agenda then it is acting as a focus for a number of other more fundamental questions. The parameters of the enlargement debate have been altered by the 11 September experience. In the first place, the uneasy relationship between NATO and Russia has improved considerably. During a visit to Moscow in late November 2001, NATO's secretary-general George Robertson informed the Russian government that enlargement would definitely go ahead, by one procedure or another. Robertson's stance reflected the new, more determined political climate in Washington and other NATO capitals after the terrorist attacks. But, rather than reacting defensively, President Putin saw an opportunity to improve Russia's relationship with NATO, and just weeks later, on 7 December, NATO and Russia agreed to work towards a new decision-making council, which would eventually replace the unsatisfactory 1997 Permanent Joint Council. The new body—the NATO–Russia Council (NRC)—was in part a reward to Putin for his support of the Bush administration's military operations in Afghanistan and the broader campaign against terrorism, and was formally established at the May 2002 NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Reykjavik.

The 11 September attacks also generated a simple new criterion for selection of new NATO members: what could the applicants bring to NATO's support for the US in the 'war against terrorism'? In this respect, Bulgaria and Romania became beneficiaries of the September 2001 crisis. Admission of these two could give NATO a coherent and geostrategically significant 'southern dimension',

connecting Hungary through the Balkans to Greece and Turkey. Not often in agreement on matters of national and regional security, Greece and Turkey shared the view that Bulgaria and Romania should be admitted. Seizing the moment, and exploiting the high level of public support for NATO membership, Romania tried energetically to make its military infrastructure useful: two military airports have been made available for transit use by friendly foreign expeditionary forces, and the Black Sea port of Constanta has become a staging point for US troops en route to operations in Kosovo.

In reality, the Prague summit is about far more than enlargement. The accession list will probably be limited to seven: the three Baltic republics, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania. This would take the membership of NATO to 26 and will raise a set of pressing questions about its future. It will make it a very large politico-military alliance whose purpose will have changed out of all recognition from that originally envisaged. Collective self-defence may have seemed a logical imperative during the Cold War, but seems far less relevant in facing the more complex challenges of collective security in a Europe characterized by internal disorder and domestic dislocation rather than external threat. A NATO enlarged to this level also raises more acutely the question of its relationship with Russia and other partners. Though it is clear that Putin's Russia is grudgingly reconciled to NATO enlargement, the particular problems which might arise between Moscow and other NATO partners in relation to the Baltic republics may still be troublesome. Furthermore, a new relationship must be forged with Ukraine: a country which now stands as the largest state in Europe—excluding Russia in its full transcontinental form—and a major non-member of the alliance (second only to Russia itself), yet which declared in May 2002 for the first time its intention to seek accession to NATO at some point in the future. The new relationship with Russia has thus left Ukraine in a category of its own, and NATO's declaration in Reykjavik that it would give 'new impetus and substance' to NATO's partnership with Ukraine remains less than convincing. Most significantly, the Prague summit will not be able to avoid questions of institutional reform within NATO, given this large increase in membership, and the critical question of assessing NATO's current military capabilities.

Though these questions will undoubtedly be asked at Prague, it is unlikely that they will be answered either satisfactorily or convincingly in the immediate future. NATO after Prague is likely to find itself occupying a rather uneasy middle ground between an imperative collective self-defence alliance and an organization like the OSCE or the EU, which have military interests but are avowedly not military organizations. The NATO of 26 nations may become a softer organization, rationalized politically more than militarily, emphasizing the Western political foundation in its character as a union of free-market democracies observing the rule of international law and enjoying peaceful relations with one another, and in that capacity retaining some genuine ability to initiate decisive military action if circumstances overwhelmingly require it. Such a middle-ground position may be uncomfortable for NATO, and will certainly

bring greater political challenges than in the past; but it is not impossible for it to occupy such ground, nor for it to be capable of meshing with American national security interests at one end of the spectrum and the institutional requirements of the EU and the OSCE at the other.

In the circumstances, however, military capability will be the key to the future success of the alliance. In truth, this has always been the case throughout NATO's history, but that credibility was never tested during the Cold War in the apocalyptic scenario of an East–West conflict; now it is frequently tested in minor operations where NATO's credibility is always on the line. Military credibility rather than enlargement as such should be the main focus of the Prague summit, and there is increasing evidence in the run-up to the event that this is becoming the case. NATO is a gestalt alliance; the attraction to its members (old and new) is that more can be achieved with military force jointly in permanent alliance than can be achieved in ad hoc cooperation or, certainly, individually. Military capability is also the key to fending off institutional rivals, as well as fending off the latest batch of the 'NATO is dying' critics. And military capability also provides what is needed in the international 'war on terrorism'.

### **NATO and the war on terrorism**

It is troubling to NATO that its contribution to America's war on terrorism has been somewhat equivocal. For the critics of NATO, the essentially unilateralist reaction of the US to the terrorist attack was proof that Washington would not use NATO's procedures or command structures in any circumstance which really mattered to it: that after the disappointment of European performance in Bosnia and the frustrations of interoperability and political sensitivities in Kosovo NATO had now—by invoking Article 5—declared its first and last war. For the defenders of NATO, the reality was rather that logistical considerations made it difficult for the US to employ the NATO alliance in its reactions to the attacks, that NATO's political support was undoubtedly important to the United States and that, as the implications of 11 September become clearer, so the place of NATO in a global and regional security strategy is also emerging. NATO's new Strategic Concept, articulated in 1999, made reference to terrorism, and the longer-term reaction of the organization and the Western allies to the challenge would prove its perspicacity.

The truth lies somewhere in between these two poles of opinion. NATO's strategic problem began with the courteous but hesitant response of the US administration to the invocation of article 5 by the North Atlantic Council when it met on 12 September. The Council agreed that the attack on the US should be regarded as an action covered by article 5 of the Washington Treaty and made it clear that the allies stood ready to offer whatever assistance would be required 'as a consequence of these acts of barbarism'. On 4 October 2001 NATO announced eight specific measures to give effect to its assistance. The first six—enhanced intelligence sharing and cooperation; the provision of

assistance to allies and others where terrorist threats increase; increased security of US and allied facilities and bases; measures to 'backfill' NATO assets which might be required in direct support of the war on terrorism; blanket overflight clearances for US aircraft; and access to ports and airfields within NATO territories—can be regarded as implicit in the character of the alliance itself. Two further measures represented the most tangible NATO reactions to the crisis. The Standing Naval Force Mediterranean (STANAVFORMED) was deployed to the eastern Mediterranean to conduct naval operations and 'actively demonstrate NATO's resolve and solidarity'. And Operation Eagle Assist, initiated on 9 October and continuing to 16 May 2002, redeployed NATO's airborne warning and control system (AWACS) aircraft to the US to help protect US airspace and free US AWACS assets for other counterterrorist roles. Some 360 sorties were flown above US airspace in this operation involving over 800 personnel from 13 NATO nations. The seven NATO AWACS aircraft represent about a quarter of the number of AWACS normally available to the US, so must be regarded as having had some useful role in relieving pressure on US aircraft and crews severely stretched elsewhere by deployments to the Gulf and Central Asia.

At the political level, then, NATO did all that an alliance of 19 was likely to be able to do in the immediate aftermath of the 11 September attacks: it provided political support and made itself available to US responses in a spirit of common endeavour against terrorist threats. But NATO was not able—and, more significantly, was not asked—to engage in force projection to tackle the particular problem of al-Qai'da operations at its existing territorial base in Afghanistan. Such an involvement might not have been politically so controversial for the European allies, given that most eventually contributed to the International Security Force for Afghanistan (ISAF) in Kabul, but it was certainly beyond their force projection, deployability and mobility thresholds, and would have severely tested their interoperability with the US.

The work that NATO aims to bring to fruition at the Prague summit includes a 'comprehensive package' of measures to strengthen the counterterrorist capabilities of NATO. This will include an adaptation of the 1999 Strategic Concept, new command and force structures to allow for greater deployability and flexibility of forces, and a raft of measures, drawn up in close cooperation with the EU, to improve capabilities to protect against attacks on NATO members by terrorists using weapons of mass destruction. The fact remains, however, that the US is more inclined to view NATO as a useful basis for ad hoc military coalitions, that it values the political weight of the alliance over its military capabilities, and that when the US engages in any serious expeditionary operations it is likely to do so using forces and command structures from Central Command (CENTCOM) or Pacific Command (PACCOM), where there is very little commonality, or even familiarity, with NATO forces and procedures. Moreover, the response of the Bush administration to the 11 September attacks has revolved around a 'doctrine' of pre-emption, articulated

in the 2002 presidential State of the Union Address. This US defence orientation is likely to dominate the Prague summit and thinking about American defence policy for some time to come. It is almost impossible to imagine unanimity within the NATO alliance on this issue. The legal basis for pre-emptive strikes, the agreement on a definition of circumstances which would justify pre-emption, and the sheer capacity to launch successful pre-emptive operations make it very unlikely that NATO, as an alliance, could line up behind the United States on this issue. The strength of President Bush's practical commitment to this notion has still to be tested, but it is very difficult to imagine that it will do anything but force the transatlantic allies further apart in the short- to medium-term future.

The judgement on the effect of the 11 September attacks on NATO must be that it has created a more acute tension than has hitherto existed between NATO's role as a problem-solving organization and its direction as a deepening institution in itself. As a problem-solving organization, NATO had to address the problem of a Warsaw Pact invasion. Now it has to address the problem of contributing to a war on terrorism, and coping with regional instabilities which may affect Europe. As a deepening institution, NATO has to respond by shaping its international agenda, proving its worth to existing allies and potential new members, and reasserting its vitality and relevance with public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic. Secretary-General George Robertson has maintained that NATO always bounces back from such crises because it manages to reinvent itself. But others have argued that since 11 September NATO faces a double crisis, one of political confidence as well as military capability, which cannot be addressed with any 'quick fix' or political sleight of hand.

### **The EU and defence**

For the Europeans, the aspiration of the EU to develop an ESDP in the general context of the Common Foreign and Security Policy offers little help, at least as it is presently envisaged. In the immediate response to the attacks of 11 September the EU fared no better than NATO, with a response that was divided and lacked substance and coherence. At an extraordinary European Council meeting of 21 September an action plan consisting of 79 different measures was introduced. These concentrated on a number of important but largely non-military issues, such as definitions of terrorism, the need for a common EU arrest warrant, interagency cooperation in the field of counterterrorism, regulations relating to money laundering, measures on air transport security and air traffic control, and the harmonization of relevant diplomatic initiatives and aid packages for Afghanistan. Efforts to coordinate and implement action plans along these lines within the EU were, however, upset by an informal trilateral meeting of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Schröder, shortly before the 19 October European Council meeting in Ghent. An attempt to repeat the conclave in London on 4 November caused considerable



offence to governments of smaller EU member states and further undermined the coordination efforts of the EU presidency, held at the time by Belgium.

In addressing the problem of terrorism, the EU is, on paper, better placed than NATO to have an impact, given its ability to act as an agent of civilian power and coordination as well as its emergent capabilities in the defence sphere as such. If the war against terror requires a multidimensional approach, then the EU has some influence over almost all the relevant dimensions. Its own ESDP structures are now satisfactorily in place—the political and security committee at ambassadorial level with its main interlocutor the NATO North Atlantic Council; the EU Military Committee; and the EU Military Staff, with its joint civil–military, 24-hour crisis centre and secure communications with national capitals. This, however, is not the essence of the problem. Rather, the problem is that the military goals which the EU set for itself in 1999—the Helsinki headline goals—though modest enough in themselves, appear now to be increasingly marginal to the immediate needs of the European allies and the transatlantic community. This is not to say that the realization of the headline force goals would not give the European allies a useful military capacity with which to address the problems of crisis management and instability in and around the continent of Europe. But the circumstances following 11 September have sharpened and accelerated a number of trends within the alliance, and whether the Helsinki goals are successful or not, they appear only to offer hope of too little extra capacity, brought on stream too slowly to make any difference to US perceptions of the European allies.

The 1999 Helsinki headline goals set out a requirement for the Europeans, acting on the authority of the EU, to be capable of deploying the equivalent of an army corps of 50,000–60,000 troops (divided into 15 separately deployable brigades), available at 60 days' notice, attended by appropriate air and maritime assets and sustainable in theatre for up to one year. This was emphatically not to be a standing EU army, but rather a process of multiple earmarking of existing forces to create synergies between them, identify and remedy gaps, and develop further interoperability. Though this capability was to serve crisis management purposes as loosely defined in the Petersberg tasks of 1992, the operational radius of 4,000km (measured from Brussels) suggested an ambitious interpretation of the scope of likely engagements. This radius encompasses north-west Africa (including the western Sahara, north Africa, and some of Sudan), the Middle East (including Israel, Palestinian territory, almost all of Iraq and some of Iran), the Caucasus region (including Georgia, Chechnya, Azerbaijan and Armenia), central and eastern Europe (including the Balkans) and western Russia. In military terms it was intended that the EU would be able to manage simultaneously one 'heavy' mission, such as the separation of belligerent forces, and one 'light' mission, such as a humanitarian or non-combatant evacuation operation.

The November 2000 Capabilities Commitment Conference brought promises of earmarked forces well in excess of the required levels, amounting to 100,000 troops, 400 aircraft and 100 ships. However, a great deal of work by the



Headline Goal Task Force (HTF)—the body of officials set up to gauge progress towards the headline goals—would be necessary before these promised national contributions could be said to be sufficiently coordinated and deployable. Though an initial operating capability was declared in late 2001 after the second capabilities conference, and the full operating capability is due to be declared in 2003, the impressive numbers themselves cannot disguise some critical deficiencies in military capacity. The HTF has long identified a daunting list of these, including airlift and sealift, combat search and rescue, suppression of enemy air defences, air-to-air refuelling, offensive electronic warfare, all-weather precision-guided and GPS-guided munitions, conventional air-launched cruise missiles, command, control, communications and intelligence, deployable headquarters, theatre missile defence, nuclear biological and chemical (NBC) protection, and logistics. Many of these deficiencies simply could not be filled in the short term (certainly not within the timescale of the project), and would require significant, and coordinated, increases in defence expenditure by EU governments. In response to these deficiencies, the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP) has been instituted to try to address the twenty ‘highest priority’ of the forty designated ‘shortfall’ areas, and though useful initiatives have been activated by a number of the working panels established in this way, the long-term needs and expenditures required to give genuine effect to the Helsinki headline goals still remain largely aspirational.

Defence spending lies at the core of the problem of turning the Helsinki headline goals into reality, producing some significant military capacity that would not otherwise exist. Those imminent improvements towards which defence planners point were all largely locked into national defence plans before the Helsinki headline goals process started. In this respect, total amounts of national defence spending are less important than the pattern of the expenditure. The Europeans still spend over 50 per cent of what the US spends on defence, but get nothing like a comparable military output for their money. Defence procurement and research and development expenditures are particularly relevant to address the shortfalls identified in the work of the HTF. But the proportions spent on defence procurement and R&D on the one hand, and on personnel and support costs on the other, vary greatly from one European partner to another: indeed, procurement and R&D expenditure by France and the UK, comparatively small though it is at €29 billion, is still more than double the €14 billion total of the other European allies combined.

Constraints on defence spending have dogged all debate on the ESDP. By May 2001, the EU’s High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, accepted that the lack of certain capabilities meant that the EU would not, after all, be able to undertake the most demanding military missions within the timetable set at Helsinki in 1999. The meeting of EU defence ministers on 12 October acknowledged the likelihood that even the interim capability would not be reached by December 2001, and preferred to speak of the EU’s military ambitions being achieved ‘progressively’. At the 19 November

2001 Capabilities Improvement Conference in Brussels, however, the same defence ministers nevertheless insisted that by 2003 the EU should be able to manage the full range of military tasks, from humanitarian missions to the use of combat forces in crisis management operations. The European Council meeting in Laeken on 14–15 December 2001 was bolder still, claiming that the EU ‘is now capable of conducting some crisis-management operations’. But this was little more than an acknowledgement that some EU governments were in a position to conduct such operations—a capability they would have had with or without the ESDP project. The illusion was exposed when the Belgian foreign minister suggested that the ESDP was now sufficiently developed for the EU to become militarily involved in Afghanistan—a suggestion that was met with little enthusiasm in other EU governments and the media.

### **The need for new military relevance in Europe**

Whether the Europeans express their defence identity through NATO and/or the EU—the ‘competition’ between them for a defence role is greatly overdrawn in a highly charged political debate in the UK—the fact remains that there is only one pool of military forces available to the Europeans. In both NATO and the EU the Europeans are struggling: struggling to meet the defence commitments they have already undertaken; struggling to develop a genuinely multifaceted approach to the new security challenges we all face, terrorist and otherwise; and struggling to remain relevant to a determined US which will not put alliance unity ahead of other national defence needs as Washington interprets them. Attempts to beef up the European military profile, whether through NATO’s Defence Capabilities Initiative, or through progress towards the EU’s Helsinki headline goals, all identify the same general deficiencies; all have made relatively small tangible progress; and all have been somewhat sidelined by the speed of events and reorientation of priorities since September 2001.

This may not be the time for the Europeans to abandon defence enhancement projects that have already absorbed a great deal of effort and appear to be bearing at least some modest fruit. But equally, this is not the time for the Europeans to replicate a full NATO in miniature with essentially the same force structures, and all the costs, virtues and vices that go with them. Instead, the Europeans should think now about the defence goals to be set after the Helsinki targets have formally been declared ‘met’ in 2003. Little official effort seems to have gone so far into thinking about the next phase of the European defence project—so absorbing is the current raft of problems and the difficulty of keeping up with the tide of events.

The Europeans may be urged by the US at Prague to offer to the transatlantic relationship some tangible European ‘strike force’ or ‘spearhead’—a better combination than presently exists of the air assault forces, the special forces and the elite forces (marines, paratroopers, etc.)—capable of participating in some key aspects of the ‘network-centric’ warfare that the US is developing. The way

such an idea is put by the US to its allies may have an important bearing on the reception it is accorded within European political circles, and its relevance will not be lost on those who are sceptical towards, or opposed outright to, any US pre-emptive action against Iraq or anywhere else. The dissolving of the Allied Command Mobile Force Land Headquarters in October 2002, occasioned by the withdrawal of the 1,500 British contingent within it, is not a good omen for the immediate future of European rapid strike capabilities. But the idea has a good deal to recommend it in the longer-term interests of the Europeans.

A 'European strike force' could be effective if it involved perhaps 40,000 troops, operating in a properly 'joint' fashion with air and maritime forces, well-equipped and trained together, and composed of enough versatile elements—as special and elite forces normally are—to give it relevance in a wide range of expeditionary operations. Above all, a force that is able to fit into a network-centric military plan, particularly in the air and maritime spheres, could add real value to US military operations above the symbolism of providing coalition partners for the sake of legitimacy. Though the US has everything in its military inventory that it might ever genuinely want, it does not always have it available in a timely and flexible fashion, with changes in location and operational tempo built into the planning and training of some of its force packages. The benefits for the Europeans of some sort of bargain on this basis would be that such forces already largely exist and have high levels of demonstrated competence. If they were organized differently and more cooperatively they could provide a functioning military asset fairly quickly—certainly just as quickly as the various enabling technologies to realize the Helsinki headline goals are likely to appear. Though the numbers involved in such a force would remain small in absolute terms, they would be comparable with the numbers regularly involved in most combined operations over the last ten years—that is, they would be highly influential in all operations short of major war-fighting, and still useful in that too, should the occasion arise. Moreover, US policy-makers appear to be expressing much greater interest in the prospects of stimulating the Europeans to some such effort by offering technological help and access to certain key elements of the network-centric warfare concept. No European power can hope to operate network-centric warfare across the board in the foreseeable future—it is a high-tech concept of complete information, combat power, mobility and discriminate lethality that Europeans will not choose to afford, even if they wanted it as a way of going into war or in other forms of conflict. But there are many avenues into those parts of the network-centric concept—particularly in the maritime and air environment which conditions the area of operations, rendering it more or less safe, more or less penetrable, etc.—where the Americans would find it to their advantage to give access to efficient, small European forces that have already proved their competence in many aspects of previous operations.

From the politico-military perspective, NATO still lacks some post-Cold War cement. In the old days that cement was provided by the sense of common

challenge and a military and nuclear strategy which ensured that everyone would be quickly and deeply involved in any significant conflict between the alliance and anyone else. Interests and risks were shared, and, at least from the standpoint of Washington, theatre nuclear weapons were the 'crown jewels' provided by the US to its allies as both the symbol and the mechanism of their common commitment. Now, however, it is not so clear that interests, still less risks, are equally shared among the NATO allies—certainly not across the transatlantic divide since 11 September, notwithstanding many strong NATO official statements to the contrary. One of the long-term virtues of the European strike force idea is that it offers the prospect of a new set of 'crown jewels' in the US sharing some sectors of its network-centric warfare capabilities, bringing the Europeans more explicitly into its revolution in military affairs, and providing them with a way of creating some relevant combat power which they themselves need and which would also help share challenges and risks among the major western allies—whether in a NATO or an EU framework. If the Prague summit makes some progress in this respect, it may make a major contribution to keeping Europe within a credible military alliance—an alliance which, of necessity, straddles the uncomfortable middle ground between collective defence and collective security—at a time of NATO and EU enlargement which could otherwise be deeply debilitating to the security interests of Europe.